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Archives Alive

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Ex-Lover Becomes Lover Once Again?

Kayla Berkowitz
University of Iowa

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Richard Hayashi: A Devoted Friend

Written By: Erinn Rogowski

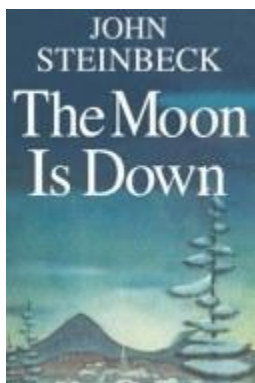
Reading through the letters on the World War II scrapbook by Evelyn Birkby turned out to be more of an interesting experience than I ever thought it would be. I never sat down to think that these letters would include emotions and difficult experiences and personal opinions, rather than a bunch of mindless chatter to pass the time for these soldiers. That being said, the letter I chose written by Richard Hayashi, a very good friend of Evelyn's, on May 14, 1943, is filled with the hard truth, some caring words, and a little bit of creative and artistic attempts by Richard to express himself and his feelings in a way only art can accomplish. When he comments on the movie "The Moon Is Down," his words are coated with honesty and hurt, welcoming a new perspective for the reader to grasp. His honesty reflects his morale, and his personality shines through his description of his duties as a soldier. As he writes on, he reflects on his feelings through a poem written about his mother, describing his longing to be in the comfort of her presence and revealing a side to soldiers we normally do not consider. Overall, his raw emotions draw sympathy from the recipient of his letter by the use of straight-forward words instead of harsh, demeaning language. In this poem, Richard not only closes his letter with a lighter tone, but he also allows the reader to realize what these soldiers feel on a day-to-day basis while being away from home. Richard's letter affected me in more than one way, and I'd like to share the feelings and experiences with you, that he shared with Evelyn.



After Richard tells Evelyn it was good to hear from her, he mentions the movie "The Moon is Down." Unfortunately we do not know exactly what Evelyn said about the movie, but we can infer that this movie offended Richard because he says "the part where the Nazis goes rampaging" did not appeal to him. His calm reaction to the offense, however, promotes sympathy in the audience, for he suppresses his feelings and makes them seem like facts.

Richard states that he wasn't particularly impressed with the movie because "seeing dead people isn't much of a harrowing experience for us who are engaged in the struggle..." While reading this sentence I paused when Dick says the words "isn't *much* of a harrowing experience," and when he identifies the war as a "struggle." His words seemed like a bit of an understatement. First of all, when he says "much," Richard's words show a hint of sarcasm, which allows the reader to think about the situation in a deeper sense, since he shows his frustration and annoyance with the images in the movie. Normally we do not think about these war films and how a soldier would feel while watching it. This change in perspective lets the reader engage and develop a sense of frustration along with Richard. Dick's mention of the word, "struggle" also has the effect of changing the reader's emotions and perspective because, as we have never been soldiers, we perceive the word as "obstacle," like an everyday occurrence. But, in fact, this was war. His comparison of the war to a struggle lowers his perception of the war. For that reason, the reader feels the need to express an excess amount of anger or frustration for him because of his humility and honesty. Therefore, the letter stirs sympathetic emotions and so succeeds in getting his point across. Through his word choice, Richard establishes who he is and gives Evelyn a small window into the personal effects of the media's glorification of war and soldiers.

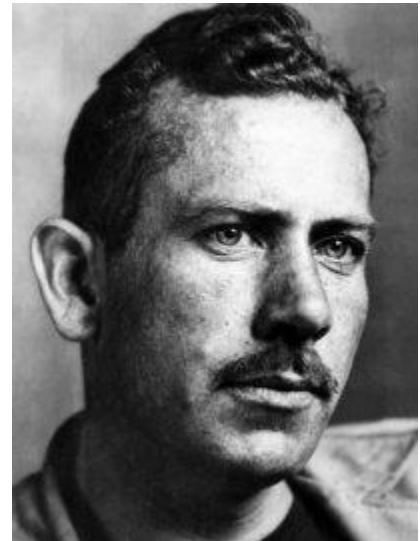
Furthermore, Dick expresses his feelings creatively with a poem called "Mother," indicating his affection toward his mother and his longing to be home. The poem compares his mother to the night sky- beautiful and comforting- as he describes how his mother is all around him: her hair, her eyes, and her graceful ways can be seen in the moon, the darkness, and the wind. His personal words let the reader know that despite our perceptions of these big, strong men at war, soldier's are vulnerable and grow scared at times like the rest of us. Through identifying with others in this case, Richard encourages a sympathetic attitude because of his sweet and almost innocent expressions, helping the reader connect emotionally with him. His artistic approach in his letter also allows him to connect to the reader in a deeper sense, since his words are all personal, creative, and his own. In that way, it seems that Richard finds comfort in Evelyn and their friendship, since he is willing to show original work to her, demonstrating the importance of their friendship to him as he lives through war away from home. In the end of his letter, Richard includes a drawing of a face, showing his fun personality, and wishes Evelyn's mother the best for Mother's Day.



Although there are many parts of Dick's letter I could analyze in a historical perspective, I chose to look into the movie "The Moon is Down" This movie, according to [IMDb](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0035476/), an online movie database, premiered in the USA on May 14, 1943, the same day Richard wrote his letter to Evelyn. The film was directed by Irving Pichel, who is known for other famous movies like "The Most Dangerous Game," a horror film about a deranged hunter (1932), "Destination Moon," a

tale about the first trip to the moon (1950), and "Martin Luther," (1953). The movie starred actors like Cedric Hardwicke, who was also featured in The Twilight Zone in 1963 as Uncle Simon Polk, and Henry Travers, recognized by our generation as Clarence the Angel from "It's a Wonderful Life." In America, the movie itself, as stated by a [N.Y. Times article of 1943](#), certainly succeeded in making the audience feel "sad," but did not stir as much passion as it should have. However, the movie is a product of a famous novel of the time.

"The Moon Is Down" is based off of the story written by John Steinbeck, famous for his bestselling novels "The Grapes of Wrath," "The Pearl," and "Of Mice and Men." The book is fictional and based during the time of World War II in Norway. German Nazis invade a small town, taking over through their advanced technology and power. However, the small town's individualism and democratic views ultimately work against the Nazis and break them down into a powerless group.



Apparently, the book ["The Moon is Down"](#) received much more recognition in European countries like Norway, Italy, Holland and Denmark. The book was especially popular in Norway, its place of setting, because of the impact it had on the underground efforts to resist and defeat the Nazis throughout Europe. However, in the United States, feelings were mixed on the type of message Steinbeck was sending. Americans viewed Steinbeck's depiction of the Nazis as far too "soft," but according to The Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies, Steinbeck's goal was not to paint a vile or monstrous picture of the Nazi group. Instead, he tried "to explore the psychological effects of occupation on both the people and their conquerors." Steinbeck wanted to

show that the Nazis were not as powerful as the world allowed them to be, and in doing so he encouraged resistance efforts across Europe. Steinbeck's overall message to the readers of his controversial war tale supports democracy and the strength of the individual in terms of the big picture, and shows the failure that fascism causes.

Overall Richard's letter to Evelyn draws emotion and sympathy, displaying him as a kind-hearted and loving person through honesty and humility. I found my letter to be one of the most unique out there. Although many others involved heart warming passages, this letter displayed Richard's personal hardships as a soldier, and his vulnerability as a young man in war. Because of his personal expression through poetry, Richard leaves Evelyn with a sense of not only happiness but also deeper connection with Richard and his situation. This project surprised me in many ways, and I can finish feeling accomplished, knowing more about the lives of these soldiers and the importance of preserving historical documents like Evelyn Birkby's WWII Scrapbook.

Resources:

"The Moon Is Down." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, n.d. Web. 06 Mar. 2014.

"Steinbeck Center." *Steinbeck Center*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 Mar. 2014.

Crowther, Bosley. "The Moon Is Down (1943) THE SCREEN; 'The Moon Is Down,' the Film Version of Steinbeck's Novel and Play, Starring Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Opens at Rivoli." *The New York Times* [New York, New York] 27 Mar. 1943: n. pag. *The New York Times*. Web. 6 Mar. 2014.

<<http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9C06E5D7143FE33BBC4F51DFB5668388...>>.